USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
DEER CREEK PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
BONNERS FERRY RANGER DISTRICT
IDAHO PANHANDLE NATIONAL FORESTS
BOUNDARY COUNTY, IDAHO

Bonners Ferry Ranger District, Idaho Panhandle National Forests
6286 Main Street
Bonners Ferry, ID 83805
Voice: (208) 267-5561 Fax: (208) 267-3732

For More Information Contact:

Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry District Ranger
Bonners Ferry Ranger District
6286 Main St.
Bonners Ferry, ID 83805-9764
(208) 267-6701

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2016, an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees completed the Deer Creek Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. The EA was made available for public review and comment.

This Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) describes my decision to proceed with this project and my conclusion that the environmental impacts will not be significant. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The Deer Creek EA, supporting resource reports, and letter of concurrence and Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are incorporated by reference into this Decision Notice and FONSI. Those documents are available for download from the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=48433.

PROJECT LOCATION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Deer Creek Project area is located on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The project area centers on the Lower Moyie River corridor, north of Moyie Springs, Idaho, and encompasses portions of the Deer Creek, Skin Creek, Curley Creek, Fry Creek, and Meadow Creek drainages. Most of the project area occurs within Boundary County, Idaho, but a small amount is located within Lincoln County, Montana. See Figure 1 for a map of the project area.

This project is part of a broader Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) that has been occurring in the lower Kootenai River Watershed. In 2011, a group called the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI) developed the Lower Kootenai River Watershed Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Proposal. That document identified the need for holistic ecological restoration across all land ownerships in the lower Kootenai River watershed. KVRI's desired condition for the lower Kootenai River Watershed is a landscape that maintains natural processes, patterns and functions, and is more resilient to unforeseen disturbances. The Deer Creek Project was designed to support the CFLRP goals as well as trend resource conditions on National Forest System lands in the area towards desired conditions that are articulated in the IPNF Forest Plan.

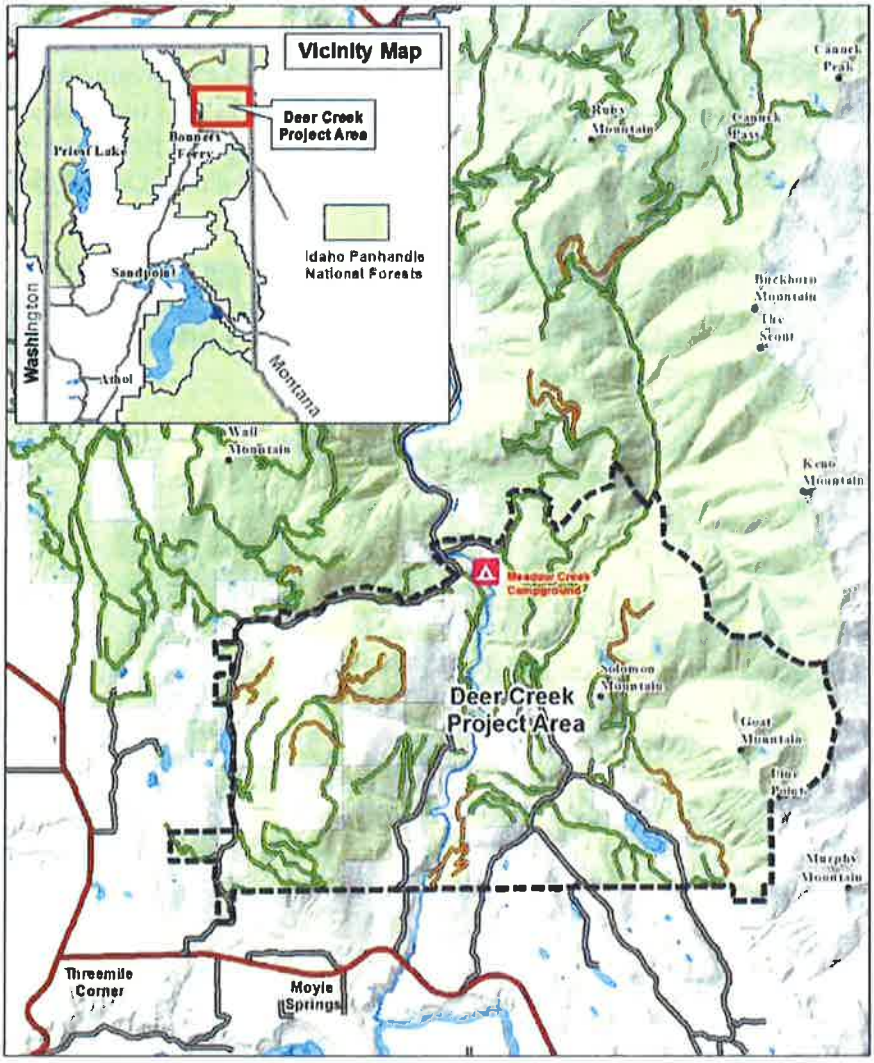

Figure 1. Location of the Deer Creek project

DECISION

I have selected alternative 2 for implementation. My rationale for selecting this alternative is described later in this notice.

After the EA was released for public comment, a number of small errors were found in the EA. The errors have been corrected in a document called the Errata Sheet for the Deer Creek Project Environmental Assessment. The document is located on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website along with many of the other documents that support this decision.

Alternative 2 will conduct vegetation and fuels treatments, road related activities, recreation enhancements and aquatic resource improvement activities. A summary of those actions is presented below along with citations for where additional information may be found in the EA.

VEGETATION AND FUEL TREATMENTS

Forest stands will be managed using shelterwood, seedtree dry site improvement, and precommercial thinning treatments on approximately 4,218 acres. Table 1 provides a summary of the acres that will be treated with each treatment type. Please see the EA (p. 11-12, and 107-110) for a thorough description of each of the treatment types and a list of which treatment will occur within each unit.

For the vegetation treatment types that involve cutting and removing merchantable timber, the trees will be removed using either a ground based or skyline cable type harvest system. The EA (p. 12) contains a description of those logging systems and Table 1 below indicates how many acres would be logged with each of those systems.

Table 1. Vegetation and fuel treatment activities in the selected alternative

Vegetation Treatments	Acres
Seedtree with Reserves	1,273
Shelterwood with Reserves	665
Seedtree and Shelterwood Removal with Precommercial Thinning	448
Dry Site Improvement	186
Smallwood Thinning	626
Burn Only	695
Precommercial Thinning	325
Total	**4,218**
Logging Systems	
Ground Based	2,225
Skyline	971
Total	**3,196**
Fuels Treatments	
Burn Only	695
Underburning	1,575
Machine Pile	1,759
Limb and Lop	188
Total	**4,218**

ROAD MANAGEMENT

The selected alternative will implement several road treatments. Table 2 provides a list of those treatments along with the associated number of miles. A detailed description of the road treatments is provided in the EA (p. 14-16). Figure 2 shows the location of the road treatments. The EA (p. 114-121) provides a list of the individual road segments along with the type of treatment that will occur on the road.

Table 2. Road management activities in the selected alternative

Road Management Activities	Miles
Maintenance	33.6
Reconstruct and Leave Open	8.8
Reconstruct and Restrict	2.2
Reconstruct and Store	5.6
Decommission with Harvest Activities	3.7
Improvement	0.9
Store	3.1
Temporary Construction	1.4
Add to System and Leave Open	1.8
Add to System and Store	1.7
Not a Road / remove from INFRA	15.9
Grant Easement to the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho	1.8
Acquire Easement from the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho	0.2

Recreation Resource Improvements

The following recreation facilities management activities will be implemented. For additional details on these items see pages 12 and 13 of the EA.

- Public access and camping opportunities will be improved and resource impacts reduced at Solomon Lake.
- Maintenance and improvement activities on approximately 10 miles of the Goat Mountain Trail #44.
- Two non-motorized trail loops will be constructed near the Meadow Creek Campground and the existing Meadow Creek trail will be expanded.
- A parking area will be created for snowmobilers on the Deer Creek Road #435.

Aquatic Improvement Activities

The selected alternative will improve the existing condition of the aquatic resources in the project by implementing the following actions. Please see page 13 and 15 of the EA for details.

- Approximately 0.9 miles of Forest Service Road 2540 near Placer Creek will be stabilized and enhanced to reduce sediment that is entering Placer Creek and nearby Spring Creek.
- Gravel will be added to a number of roads in the vicinity of stream crossings to lessen the amount of sediment that is reaching creeks.
- Undersized and/or failing road culverts will be replaced or removed in order to improve aquatic organism passage and Forest Service staff will continue to work with the Burlington Northern Railroad to eliminate a partial fish migration barrier on Meadow Creek.

Noxious Weed Treatments

Weed populations will be treated along the roads that are used for hauling timber before and after timber harvest activities. Weed populations along road segments that will be decommissioned or stored will be treated prior to decommissioning or storage (this includes temporary roads). Gravel pits that are used will also be treated. For additional information on the weed treatments please see page 14 of the EA.

Additional Opportunities

The team of resource specialists that worked on this project identified some additional actions that would further improve the condition of various resources in the project area. With one exception, all of these opportunities are listed and described on pages 17-18 of the EA (see section titled "Further Opportunities"). The exception is that there is one additional opportunity listed on page 14 of the EA that is related to treating additional weed populations.

Because of current funding and staffing limitations, I am not able to guarantee that the activities that are listed in the EA on the pages cited above, will be implemented. If funding does become available, a decision will be issued for those activities.

Design Features and Monitoring Activities

With one exception, my decision to select alternative 2 includes incorporating all of the design measures and monitoring activities that are included in appendix C of the EA (p. 129-147). The single exception is in regard to activities I am deciding to implement on the portion of road 2225 that will be placed into storage.

On page 130 of the EA there is a description of what specific actions were proposed in order to place portions of roads 2224 and 2225 into storage. However, rather than removing the culverts on the stored segment of the 2225 road as was originally described, I have decided not to remove the culverts. My decision is in response to a request that I received from members of the Kootenai Valley Sportsman Association. Members of that group requested that I consider leaving the culverts in that road so that their members as well as the general public could walk on the road prism without having to walk up and down steep stream embankments that would be created if culverts were removed. Concerns about older people potentially falling and hurting themselves while they crossed the streams was expressed.

Therefore, I have decided to leave the culverts in the stored portion of the 2225 road and implement some additional measures to reduce the risk that the culverts that are left in the road would become plugged or otherwise fail to function properly in the future. I have decided to utilize the sportman group to conduct periodic monitoring of the culverts and if need be, I will allocate staff and maintenance funds to ensure the culverts are maintained. Additional detail of this changed design feature and monitoring activity may be found in the project file (document # B-12.

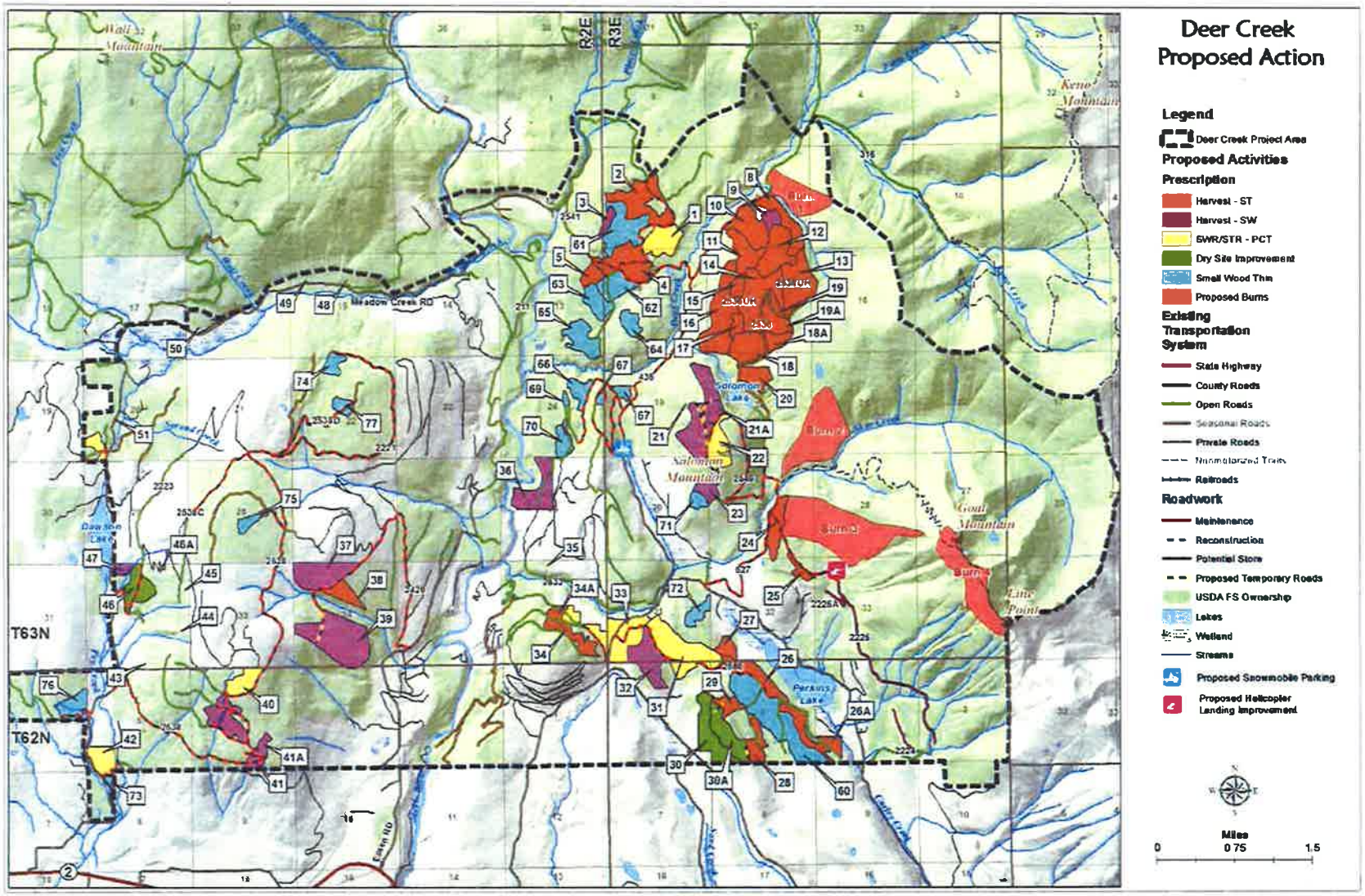

Figure 2. Map of the selected alternative

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Please see pages 18 through 19 of the EA for a discussion of the extensive public involvement and collaborative efforts that lead up to the development of the proposed action and alternatives.

On January 22, 2016, the EA was made available for a 30-day public review and comment period. I received 16 letters from interested parties. In addition, another collaborative meeting was held with the KVRI group to discuss road management topics.

Approximately 50 substantive[1] comments were identified from the letters I received. The interdisciplinary team conducted a thorough analysis of the comments and prepared responses to each one (see the IPNF website or the project file). Based on a review of the comments I concluded that there were no new substantive issues raised that might necessitate adding another alternative or conducting additional environmental analysis.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The interdisciplinary team evaluated a total of nine alternatives. Five of these alternatives were eliminated from detailed consideration in the EA because they would either fail to meet the purpose and need, were technologically infeasible or illegal, were covered by existing project design features, or would result in unreasonable environmental harm. The EA (p. 24-26) provides details of the alternatives that were eliminated from further analysis.

The following four alternatives were analyzed in detail in the EA:

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative. The analysis of this alternative represents the effects of not implementing the proposed activities and therefore, of not achieving the purpose and need. Page 19 of the EA provides additional information on this alternative.

Alternative 2 is the alternative that I have selected to implement. As discussed in detail in the EA, this alternative was designed to meet the resource needs that are discussed on pages 5 through 10 of the EA, and to fulfill the specific objectives described on pages 3 and 4 of the EA.

Alternative 3 was specifically designed to respond to the following two concerns associated with the activities that were proposed within the Keno Bear Management Unit (BMU):

- Concern about the effects that the proposed action (alternative 2) would have on public access in the BMU.
- Concern about the disturbance impacts that timber harvesting and other associated activities could have on grizzly bears in the BMU.

As opposed to the proposed action, alternative 3 would not place any roads into storage within the BMU and would not conduct timber harvest activities within or adjacent to the BMU. Additional information on this alternative is presented on pages 20-23 of the EA.

Alternative 4 was developed to address concerns about the effects of sediment from Forest Service Road 2540 on cutthroat trout in Placer Creek. Alternative 4 is identical to alternative 2 with the exception that it would decommission approximately 0.9 miles of Forest Service Road 2540 along Placer Creek. Additional details about this alternative are provided on page 21 of the EA.

[1] See 36 CFR 218 regarding substantive comments.

A comparison of the actions that are included in the various alternatives can be found in tables 6, 7, and 8 on pages 22 and 23 of the EA.

DECISION RATIONALE

My decision was based on the information in the EA, the supporting project file, public comments received and consideration of issues. I evaluated the alternatives based on how well each would achieve the purpose and need for the project and address issues and public concerns.

ACHIEVING THE PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need for the Deer Creek project was developed by considering the difference between the desired conditions for the project area with that of the existing resource conditions in the project area (as described in more detail in the EA (p. 3). Collaboration with KVRI and other interested groups and individuals led to the identification of management actions that could be taken to address resource needs. Please see page 2 through10 of the EA for a thorough discussion of the purpose and need for this project. In summary, the purpose and need for the Deer Creek project includes the following:

- Maintain and improve landscape resiliency and resistance to disturbances such as wildfire, drought, and insects and diseases by managing for desirable forest composition, stocking levels and pattern.
- Promote forest conditions that reduce fire hazard on National Forest System lands, aiding fire suppression efforts to reduce the potential impacts of wildfire in order to protect firefighters, resource values and private lands.
- Maintain and improve recreation facilities.
- Improve aquatic resource conditions.
- Contain or control non-native invasive plant ("noxious weed") populations.
- Contribute to the local economy through utilization of forest products.
- Manage the transportation system to meet resource objectives.

Alternative 1 (no action) would not achieve the project objectives noted above, nor would it respond to the underlying resource needs that were identified within the project area. Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 would each meet the project objectives to various degrees.

Alternatives 2 and 4 would better meet the purpose and need of promoting forest conditions that maintain and improve landscape resiliency and reduce fire hazard by treating more acres of forest vegetation. (EA, p. 28-34). By harvesting more forest products, alternatives 2 and 4 would be more responsive to contributing to the local economy through the utilization of forest products than would alternative 3 (EA, p. 98-101).

All of the action alternatives would respond more or less equally to the maintenance and improvement of recreation facilities (EA, p. 87-90), containing or controlling non-native invasive plant populations (EA, p. 75-78) and managing the transportation system to meet resource objectives.

In regard to improving aquatic resource conditions, all of the action alternatives would meet this objective. However, by decommissioning part of the Placer Creek road that is located next to the

creek, alternative 4 would respond to this specific objective to a higher degree than would alternative 2 or 3 (EA, p. 45-58).

ISSUES AND PUBLIC CONCERNS

In addition to evaluating how the various alternatives would meet the project objectives, I also considered the issues that were identified during the analysis process. As described in more detail on pages 18-19 of the EA, two substantive public issues were identified as a result of scoping efforts on the proposed action. These are:

1. **Effects to public access from the transportation system management changes needed to operate in the BMU; effects of the proposed activities on grizzly bears and their habitat.**

Alternative 3 was developed to respond to the issue related to public access in the BMU and impacts to grizzly bears. Alternative 3 analyzed in detail the effects of the proposed action without treating vegetation or changing road designations in the BMU. Table 4 on page 16 of the EA provides detailed information on the specific roads within the BMU that would be change designations under either alternative 2 or 4[2]. No road designation changes would occur under alternative 3. However, compared to alternatives 2 and 4, alternative 3 would forego conducting timber harvesting and restoration treatments on approximately 1,116 acres.

During the season when grizzly bears could be active (April 1 through December 1), alternatives 2 and 4 would result in a short-term (i.e. during project implementation) reduction of motorized public access of 0.5 miles of road (due to storing 0.5 miles of road 2224). However, upon project completion, there would be a slight net increase of open motorized road during that same season. This would occur as a result of opening 0.67 miles of road 2536 while considering the reduction of 0.5 miles from road 2224. Therefore, after the project is implemented, there would actually be an increase in open motorized road of 0.17 miles from April to December.

During the grizzly bear denning season (December through March), alternatives 2 and 4 would result in the loss of public motorized access on 2.94 miles of road (2.09 miles of road 2225, 0.35 miles of 2225A, and 0.5 miles of road 2224). However, depending upon snow conditions, some of those road miles may not be drivable during the winter months without an over-the-snow vehicle. Currently, roads 2225 and 2225A are open from December 1 to March 31.

In addition to considering public road access associated with the BMU, I also considered impacts to the grizzly bear and its habitat. The effects of implementing the various alternatives on grizzly bear are described on pages 62 through 64 of the EA, and in more detail, on pages 34-46 of the Wildlife Report. Alternatives 2 and 4 have the potential to disturb or displace grizzly bears to a greater degree than would alternative 3. However, alternatives 2 and 4 could improve forage conditions in the BMU more than would alternative 3 (project file).

After considering how the action alternatives would impact both public access in the BMU as well as grizzly bears and their habitat, I have concluded that the impacts that alternatives 2 and 4 would have are not substantial enough to warrant selecting alternative 3 because to do so, I would be required to forego treating a large area of lodgepole pine-dominated timber stands that have a fairly high risk of being attacked by bark beetles, and comprise a large area of contiguous

[2] Table 4 on page 16 of the EA contains some minor errors in road mileage. She the Errata Sheet document on the IPNF public website for corrected figures.

heavy fuels (EA, pp. 5-6, 20, 28, and 44). As a result, if I were to select alternative 3 I would not be achieving two of the objectives that I have for the project nearly as well as I would with either alternative 2 or 4.

2. Effects of erosion from Forest Service Road 2540 to cutthroat trout in Placer Creek.

Forest Service Road 2540 is located immediately adjacent to Placer Creek for a distance of approximately 0.9 miles. As described in more detail on pages 19-21 of the EA, the road fill, as well as some road surface and ditch material, has been eroding into the creek. The erosion could affect an isolated population of westslope cutthroat trout that resides in this section of the creek. Westslope cutthroat trout is listed as a sensitive species in the northern Region of the Forest Service.

Alternative 4 was developed to address the concerns about effects of sediment from Forest Service Road (FSR) 2540 on cutthroat trout in Placer Creek. Alternative 4 proposed to decommission approximately 0.9 miles of FSR 2540 along Placer Creek (see page 21 of the EA for more details).

I chose to implement alternative 2 and not alternative 4 for the reasons discussed below.

Sediment entering Placer Creek will be reduced by implementing the proposed action.

The proposed action includes measures to reduce sediment entering Placer Creek. These measures include stabilizing and enhancing approximately 0.9 miles of FSR 2540 located immediately adjacent to Placer Creek. This involves grading the road and adding rock to the road surface, installing four cross drains and relocating one ditch relief culvert. It also includes replacing an existing culvert where the road crosses Spring Creek with a structure that provides unimpeded passage for aquatic organisms (EA p. 13). According to page 49 of the Hydrology Report, these improvements to Road 2540 would reduce point sources of sediment. Overall, the actions would result in a net reduction in sediment delivery to Placer Creek (Hydrology Report, p. 50).

The fisheries analysis concurs that the improvements proposed under alternative 2 for this section of road would almost certainly reduce the chronic sediment input created by existing road conditions. But the larger threat to the trout population is from road-fill and cut-slope failures. Being placed right on top of Placer Creek, this section of road was built in a poor location and has been failing for years, as is evident by the numerous fill-slope repairs that exist along this section of road. There is a risk of road and cut-slope failure by leaving this section of road in place. A road failure could damage the habitat that supports the isolated population of westslope cutthroat trout. However, the fisheries report also acknowledges that decommissioning this section of road would not guarantee the elimination of an occasional mass failure along the creek, because the road has already destabilized the adjacent hillslope (Fisheries Report, p. 26).

The local community places a high value on the access provided by the 0.9 mile section of FSR 2540.

Many community members were not in favor of removing of this section of road. This was evident from discussions during public meetings and written comments we received on the EA (see the project file and Response to Comments on the EA).

We have invested over two years in public collaboration specific to the Deer Creek project area and I do not take this involvement lightly. I value all input regarding the planning of our projects, especially when considering my decision. The discussions through the collaborative public forums were invaluable in understanding public sentiment regarding the proposed action for this project.

Knowing the value the community places on FSR 2540 and the access it provides assisted my decision to choose alternative 2.

Decommissioning the 0.9 mile section of FSR 2540 would impact the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.

Removing part of FSR 2540 would limit tribal members from access to activities and resources that allow for the continuation of tribal traditional life ways and culture, impacting access to Treaty-reserved hunting, gathering, and religious practice rights (EA, p. 87). The Kootenai Tribe does not support alternative 4, as stated in their comments on the EA:

> *The Kootenai Tribe appreciates the attention to the westslope cutthroat trout population in Placer Creek that led to the analysis of Alternative 4 that would decommission Placer Creek Road. Westslope cutthroat trout are a Treaty resource of importance to the Tribe. Unfortunately, westlope cutthroat trout populations have dwindled to a number that does not fully meet Treaty, subsistence or cultural needs.*
>
> *The Tribe believes that the treatments proposed in Alternative 2 adequately addresses sedimentation to Placer Creek, while maintaining Treaty access* (see project file).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe alternatives 2 and 4 meet the purpose and need for the project better than alternative 3. In comparing alternatives 2 and 4, I decided to select alternative 2 because it addresses the issue of sediment entering Placer Creek while still maintaining public access.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Each resource report provides a section on how this project is consistent with the laws and regulations relevant to that resource. After reviewing each report and the environmental assessment, I find my decision to implement alternative 2 complies with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

This project does not require any forest plan amendments. Project activities are consistent with the NFMA (16 USC 1604 (i)) and the forest plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (2015) and will provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area to meet overall multiple-use objectives (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(B)).

2015 Forest Plan Consistency

This decision is being signed under the authority and direction provided by the 2015 record of decision for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests forest plan. For specifics on how each resource meets relevant forest plan components (i.e., goals, desired conditions, objectives, guidelines and standards), please refer to the resource reports on the IPNF website at http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44051.

Based on a review of these documents and the project record, I find that this project complies with 36 CFR 219.15 and the 2015 forest plan direction in the form of desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. The environmental analysis and project record provide detail on consistency with the forest plan. The following table is a brief summary of the more important resource analysis findings and how well the individual alternatives meet the management direction provided in the forest plan.

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
Air Quality	Regarding smoke produced through prescribed burning activities, the forest plan desired condition for air quality (forest plan, p. 33) states: > The Forest meets applicable federal, state, or tribal air quality standards, including areas classified as Class 1 airsheds (e.g., Cabinet Mountains Wilderness) and nonattainment areas. I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it best meets forest plan direction and because it will reduce hazardous fuels over more acres than either alternative 1 or 3. Alternative 3 will also use prescribed burning to reduce fuels, but on fewer acres. Alternative 1 would not reduce any hazardous fuels and vegetation would continue to accumulate over time. Consequently, the risk of a wildfire would trend higher across the project area as would the risk of surpassing air quality standards because of an escaped wildfire (EA, pp. 43-44 and fire and fuels report). Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the *Issues and Public Concerns* section.
Aquatics, Water Resources	The forest plan directs (pp. 22-23, 71, 85) that projects should: > Maintain or improve watershed conditions in order to provide water quality, water quantity, and soil productivity necessary to support ecological functions and beneficial uses. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 meet the direction of the forest plan for water resources because all activities have been designed to reduce current and future sediment sources from entering the stream systems. Both alternatives 2 and 4 are similar because they proposed equal amounts

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
	of vegetation treatment. The design features listed in appendix c of the EA will help protect soil and water. Alternative 1 would not fix sediment sources or reduce the risk of road crossing failures; this lack of action would trend away from forest plan desired conditions. Alternative 3 would treat approximately 1,116 acres of vegetation less than alternatives 2 and 4. I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it meets forest plan direction and because it treats more area of vegetation and hazardous fuels than alternative 1 or 3; thus reducing the risk of sediment entering the streams after a wildfire event (EA, pp. 25, 36, 41, 43; hydrology report; project file). Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of vegetation as alternative 2, I chose not to implement that alternative for reasons described in the section *Issues and Public Concerns.*
Aquatics, Fisheries	The forest plan goal for aquatic habitat (forest plan, p. 26) states: > Restore aquatic habitats where past management activities have affected stream channel morphology or wetland function. I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it meets forest plan direction and because it treats more area of vegetation and hazardous fuels than alternatives 3 or 1; thus reducing the risk of sediment entering the streams after a wildfire event (EA, pp. 67; fisheries report; project file). Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of vegetation as alternative 2, I chose not to implement that alternative for reasons described in the section *Issues and Public Concerns.* Road-associated activities would likely be beneficial to the fisheries resource by reducing chronic sediment input into the streams or the activities would be neutral and wouldn't cause detrimental effects due to the activities proximity to project area streams (EA, p. 55). In terms of road sediment risk and aquatic organism passage, alternatives 2 and 4 would make more progress toward forest plan direction than alternative 3. This is because alternatives 2 and 4 include more road reconstruction, road improvement, and road storage. Both alternatives also upgrade or replace culverts that will allow for aquatic organism passage and increase the amount of accessible aquatic habitat (EA, pp. 13 and 21). Alternative 1 would not make any headway toward meeting the direction in the forest plan and the chronic sediment sources and risk to water quality would remain (EA, p. 53).

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
	Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are consistent with the Endangered Species Act for fisheries (EA, p. 57).
Botany: Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Plants	The forest plan desired conditions for threatened, endangered or sensitive plant species (forest plan pp. 13-14) state: > Habitat for plant species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is maintained or restored on National Forest System lands, thus contributing to species recovery or delisting. Ecological conditions and processes that sustain the habitats currently or potentially occupied by sensitive plant species are retained or restored. The geographic distributions of sensitive plant species in the forest plan area are maintained. I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it reduces the most acres of hazardous fuels and reduces the risk of losing the sensitive plant habitat to wildfires (EA, pp. 72 and 74). Alternatives 1 and 3 would not be as effective at meeting this forest plan direction because they treat fewer acres of hazardous fuels. Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of vegetation as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the section *Issues and Public Concerns.* No potentially suitable habitat for, or occurrences of, threatened or endangered plants were found within the project area (EA, pp. 70-71). Some sensitive plants and forest species of concern were identified within the project area during botanical surveys. By incorporating design features and buffering the plants from project activities, these plant species should be adequately protected (rare plants report, pp. 71, 73-74).
Cultural Resources	Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 meet forest plan direction and are expected to have no direct effects on all known heritage sites within the project planning area as long as the design criteria are followed (EA, pp. 79-83).
Economics	From the forest plan on page 41, the goal is to: > Contribute to the social and economic well-being of local communities by promoting sustainable use of renewable natural resources. Provide timber for commercial harvest, forage for livestock grazing, opportunities for gathering firewood and other special forest products, permitted recreation residences, and settings for recreation consistent with goals for watershed health, sustainable ecosystems, biodiversity, and scenic/recreation opportunities. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would meet the forest plan goal to contribute to the economic well-being of local communities through the utilization of forest products. The economic differences between the alternatives are displayed in Table 37 (EA, p. 101). Table 37 shows

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
	that alternative 2 would result in more volume and ultimately more revenue than alternative 3. Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the section *Issues and Public Concerns.*
Fire and Fuels	The forest plan desired conditions for fire and fuels management are: Public and firefighter safety is always recognized as the first priority for all fire management activities (forest plan, pp. 21-22). Hazardous fuels are reduced within the wildland-urban interface and other areas where values are at risk. Fire behavior characteristics and fuel conditions exist in these areas that allow for safe and effective fire management. Fire behavior is characterized by low-intensity surface fires with limited crown fire potential. Forest conditions, and the pattern of conditions across the landscape, exist in these areas such that the risk is low for epidemic levels of bark beetles, high levels of root disease, and large scale, stand replacement wildfires. The use of wildland fire (both planned and unplanned ignitions) increases in many areas across the Forest. Fire plays an increased role in helping to trend the vegetation towards the desired conditions while serving other important ecosystem functions. However, when necessary to protect life, property and key resources, many wildfires are still suppressed. I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it makes the most progress toward meeting forest plan desired conditions and because it implements the forest plan direction on the most acres. Alternative 3 treats fewer acres and is less effective at meeting the forest plan direction. Alternative 1 would trend away from forest plan desired conditions because it would not address current fuel conditions and would not address fire behavior as fuels would continue to accumulate and increase the risk of extreme fire behavior (EA, p. 44). Although alternative 4 treats the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the *Issues and Public Concerns* section.
Forest Vegetation	The forest plan goal (forest plan p. 11) for vegetation communities is: Plant communities are trending toward the desired conditions for composition, structure, patterns, and processes. The ecological integrity of the communities is high and they exhibit resistance and resiliency to natural and man-caused disturbances and stressors, including climate change.

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
	The forest plan desired condition for vegetation composition (forest plan p. 11) is: The composition of the forest is within the desired ranges for the dominance groups illustrated in figure 2. More of the forest is dominated by western white pine, ponderosa pine, western larch, and whitebark pine. Conversely, less of the forest is dominated by grand fir, western hemlock, western redcedar, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, and subalpine fir. Approximately 83 percent of the National Forest System lands in the Deer Creek project area are designated as General Forest (MA6). In much of this management area, vegetation management activities have a dominant role in affecting the composition, structure, and pattern of vegetation. The vegetation management activities under alternative 2 will trend the vegetation toward the forest plan desired conditions (EA, pp. 28-33). The remaining 17 percent of the National Forest System lands in the Deer Creek project area are allocated to Backcountry lands (MA5) which is in the Buckhorn Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area (#661). Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are consistent with direction in the IPNF Forest Plan and other laws pertaining to land management within Inventoried Roadless Area (EA, pp. 90-91). I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it trends the most acres towards the desired conditions listed in the forest plan. Alternative 3 would do so on fewer acres and alternative 1 would trend away from the goals and desired conditions outlined in the forest plan. For details on the effects to forest composition and structure, please refer to the EA (pp. 28-31) and the vegetation report. Although alternative 4 would treat the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the *Issues and Public Concerns* section.
Non-native Invasive Plants (Noxious Weeds)	Forest plan desired conditions (forest plan, p. 14) for non-native plants are: Newly invading, non-native invasive plant species are treated and populations are contained or eradicated. The weed program on the IPNF uses integrated pest management approaches, including prevention and control measures that limit introduction, intensification, and spread due to management activities. Agreements with cooperative weed management areas assist in control efforts across jurisdictional boundaries. Alternative 1 does not help trend the project area toward meeting forest plan desired conditions in a significant manner. Noxious weed management would continue to occur as the Bonners Ferry Ranger

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
	District Noxious Weed Control EIS allows, which for the Deer Creek project area is very limited. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 meet forest plan desired conditions by allowing weed treatments. The risk of establishment of new weed invaders to the project area is expected to be low with implementation of the required design features. Furthermore, treatments of existing weed populations (both pre- and post-haul, as well as routinely on certain forest routes) will greatly reduce the overall effects that other proposed activities may have on potential weed spread (EA, p. 77).
Old Growth	On page 19 of the forest plan, standards include the following: Within old growth stands, timber harvest or other vegetation management activities shall not be authorized if the activities would likely modify the characteristics of the stand to the extent that the stand would no longer meet the definition of old growth (see glossary [in the forest plan] for old growth definition). Within the ancient cedar groves, timber harvest or other vegetation management activities shall not be authorized (exceptions may occur for the treatment of non-native invasive plants, activities needed to address human health and safety issues such as the removal of hazard trees adjacent to a recreation site, or in the circumstance where a natural, unplanned ignition is allowed to burn into a grove under a low intensity). No old growth would be treated with any alternative in the Deer Project (EA, p. 32). With regard to protecting old growth stands from wildfire, I am choosing to implement alternative 2 because it would reduce the overall risk of wildfire in the project area better than alternative 3. Alternatives 2 and 3 comply with the old growth standards because no old growth stands are being harvested with this project. Although alternative 4 would treat the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the *Issues and Public Concerns* section. Alternative 1 would trend the area away from forest plan desired conditions because it would not address current fuel conditions and would not address fire behavior as fuels would continue to accumulate and increase the risk of extreme fire behavior. Consequently, the risk of a wildfire would trend higher across the project area and we would risk losing old growth stands and the habitat they provide to wildfires (EA, pp. 35-44 and fire and fuels report).

Resource	Analysis Findings and Consistency with the 2015 Forest Plan
Recreation	For this project, applicable forest plan desired conditions are found on page 34: A variety of motorized and non-motorized winter and summer recreation opportunities are available. Well-designed and maintained trailheads exist and offer adequate parking and turnaround areas. Trails are designed and maintained for the given users (saddle stock, snowmobiles, off-highway vehicle users, hikers, and mountain bikers). All proposed activities in the Deer Creek project meet forest plan direction equally well (EA, p. 88).
Soils	A forest plan goal for managing the soil resource is found in the forest plan starting on page 23: Maintain soil productivity and ecological processes where functioning properly, and restore where currently degraded. Maintain the physical, chemical, and biological properties of soils to support desired vegetation conditions and soil-hydrologic functions and processes within watersheds. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are consistent with direction in the IPNF Forest Plan and Region 1 Soil Quality Standards (EA, p. 70).
Scenic Quality	A forest plan guideline on page 72 states: Management activities should be consistent with the Scenic Integrity Objective of low to high. With the implementation of the design measures, alternative 2, 3, and 4 would meet the forest plan Scenic Integrity Objective of Moderate where identified and of High where identified (EA, p. 98).
Wildlife	The forest plan lists the goals, desired conditions, objectives standards and guidelines for wildlife on pages 29 to 33. All alternatives are consistent with applicable goals, direction, standards, and guidelines from the forest plan for the management of wildlife habitat and species populations (EA, p. 65). For species-specific discussions on this compliance, please refer to the project file. Although alternative 4 would treat the same amount of acres as alternative 2, I chose not to implement alternative 4 for reasons described in the *Issues and Public Concerns* section.

Other NFMA Consistency Requirements

Suitability for timber production (16 USC 1604[k]): Harvest will not occur on sites identified as not suitable for timber production (Forest Vegetation report).

Stands of trees are harvested according to requirements for culmination of mean annual increment (CMAI) of growth (16 USC 1604(m)): As discussed in detail in the Forest Vegetation report (p. 33-34), the project will meet this requirement.

Soil, slope or other watershed conditions (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][i] and protection for streams and other bodies of water (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][iii]): Features of the selected alternative described in this decision and the environmental assessment will ensure that soil, water, and watershed resources will be protected (see the Watersheds and Hydrology section the EA (p. 45-52), the Soils section of the EA (p. 67-70), as well as those respective reports for details.

Restocking (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][ii]): Technology and professional knowledge were applied to assure that adequate stocking will occur within five years after final harvest (Forest Vegetation report, p. 33).

Economic factors (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][iv]): Management practices were governed by ecosystem restoration objectives, not strictly economics. See the Economic section in the EA (p. 98-101) as well as the Economic resource report for additional details.

Clearcutting and even-aged management (16 USC 1604[g][3][F]): No clearcutting will occur, Even-aged management will occur and was found to be appropriate to meet Forest Plan direction. See the Forest Vegetation report for additional details (p. 34).

Temporary roadways (16 USC 1608[b]) and standards of roadway construction (16 USC 1608[c]): NFMA requires that the necessity of roads be documented and that road construction be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources (16 USC 1608). A travel analysis process was used to identify the condition of and provided management recommendations for each road system in the project area (project file).

NFMA also requires that roads are planned and designed to reestablish vegetation cover on the disturbed areas within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the National Forest Transportation System (16 USC 1604, Sec. 8). The road reconstruction is designed with comprehensive drainage plans to limit road runoff from entering streams. Examples include installing properly spaced ditch relief culverts near stream crossings to divert flow out of the ditch and onto the forest floor where the rough, vegetated surface can filter out sediment and runoff can infiltrate into the uncompacted soil.

Clean Water Act, Including State of Idaho Implementation

According to the hydrology analysis, the selected alternative is consistent with the requirements of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act as amended by the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1251. See the EA (pp. 48 and 51) and the Hydrology Resource Report (pp. 2-3, 60) for additional details.

Idaho Forest Practices Act

Soil and water conservation practices will be applied for all proposed activities, and all activities will comply with guidelines in the soil and water conservation handbook. See the EA (p. 51) and Hydrology Resource Report (p. 56) for details.

Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act

The selected alternative will be consistent with the requirements of this act. See the EA (p. 51) and Hydrology Resource Report (p. 56) for details.

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990

This project proposes no development within wetlands or floodplains and the effects analysis shows there would be no downstream adverse effects that could modify wetlands or floodplains; therefore, the selected alternative is consistent with these executive orders. See the EA (p.52) and Hydrology Resource Report (p. 56) for details.

Executive Order 12962 – Recreational Fishing

The selected alternative complies with this order. See the EA (p. 57) and Fishery Resource report (p. 32) for details.

Clean Air Act

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group, which is composed of members who conduct a "major" amount of prescribed burning and the regulatory and health agencies that regulate this burning. The prescribed burning associated with my selected alternative will be monitored and controlled by airshed regulations to avoid individual or cumulative violations of air quality standards and therefore, is in compliance with the Clear Air Act (see Fire and Fuels Resource report, p. 25).

Endangered Species Act

The selected alternative is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. See the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plant Resource reports for details. In addition, see item 9 in the "Finding of No Significant Impact" section.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The selected alternative is in compliance with this act (Wildlife Resource report, p. 5)

National Historic Preservation Act

As described in the EA (p. 78-84), the Cultural Resource report and in item 9 in the "Finding of No Significant Impact" section, the selected alternative is in compliance with this act. .

Executive Order 12898- Environmental Justice Act

The selected alternative will not disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. There were no public comments raised regarding environmental justice considerations, and no disproportional impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis. Therefore the selected alternative complies with this order.

Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species

The selected alternative will meet this order. See pages 19-20 of the Invasive Plants Risk Assessment report for additional details.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon my review of the EA and supporting documentation, I have determined this project (the selected alternative -alternative 2) is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As described below, my finding is based on considering both the context in which the impacts will occur as well as the intensity of effects. As a result of this finding, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for this project.

CONTEXT

When considering whether environmental impacts are significant, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) requires that the action "…be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant" (40 CFR 1508.27 (a)).

The activities in this project are site-specific and will occur over a relatively small geographic area of public land within Boundary County in northern Idaho (figure 1). The duration of project activities will be fairly short. The main activities – forest vegetation management and fuel reduction – are limited to approximately 4,218 acres (table 1 and figure 2). Road actions will take place in part of the project area as shown in table 2. The timber sale contracts to implement most of the project actions are anticipated to be awarded between 2017 and 2019, and activities associated with those contracts are expected to be completed by 2025. Prescribed burning and tree planting in the sale units will be completed within 5 years of tree harvesting.

The environmental effects of this project are local in nature and will not significantly affect the human environment at regional, national, or global scales. This is discussed in more detail in the "Intensity" section. Project activities are a continuation of similar programs and projects that have occurred for many decades on the IPNF and across the region and nation. The proposal's relatively small scale, along with the implementation of design features and soil and water conservation practices, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and the application of current research, limit effects on the environment. Those items serve to avoid or minimize negative effects to the extent they are often undetectable or immeasurable, even at the local level.

The physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the project were analyzed at appropriate scales: within the project area, adjacent to the project area, or in some instances, across a larger landscape. The analysis area differs for each resource, and rationale for each analysis area is provided in the specialist reports. The analysis in the EA and resource reports focused on the public issues and resources the proposed action and alternatives had the possibility to affect.

INTENSITY

The Council for Environmental Quality describes intensity as the severity of impact and indicates that the following ten factors should be considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)).

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.

I considered the effects of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in conjunction with the individual beneficial and adverse effects resulting from this project. The effects are not significant in terms of intensity when considered in various contexts, and they are within the range of effects identified in the IPNF Forest Plan. My determination does not rely on beneficial effects overriding adverse ones.

The effects of my decision to implement alternative 2 are discussed in the EA and are listed by resource. For example, "Effects to Vegetation" begins on page 28 of the EA, and the cumulative effects of implementing each alternative are explained on pages 33 to 34.

For some resources and issues analyzed, implementing alternative 2 will result in both beneficial and adverse effects. None of the adverse effects exceed an intensity threshold when viewed in various contexts. Many of the predicted effects were identified and mitigated early in the design phase of this project using input from the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative collaboration group, local landowners, and the interdisciplinary team.

The following is a summary of the effects the selected alternative would have on many of the resources analyzed in the EA. Effects to some resources (for example, historical or cultural resources, threatened or endangered wildlife species) are considered in one or more of the other intensity factors. More detail on the effects may be found in the environmental assessment and the specialist reports.

Forest Vegetation – there will be beneficial effects from moving tree composition, structure, and pattern toward desired conditions. One of these beneficial effects is increasing the percentage of potentially long-lived seral species (ponderosa pine, western larch, and white pine) across the landscape and decreasing the percentage of shade-tolerant species like grand fir and shorter-lived seral species like lodgepole pine (EA p. 28-34). No adverse effects will occur. The actions and effects associated with the selected alternative will meet all relevant laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for management of forest vegetation (Forest Vegetation Report, p. 25 and 32 through 39).

Fuels –Modifying the amount and arrangement of hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface will have beneficial effects. It will reduce the potential for extreme fire behavior and the probability of a large, uncontrollable wildfire (EA, p. 35-44). This will provide a safer environment for fire fighters and the public (Fire and Fuels Report, p. 5).

During a relatively short period when timber harvest activities are occurring in a specific treatment area but slash and other fuel treatments have yet to be completed, there will be an increased risk of fire ignition. This is the result of more fine fuels on the forest floor and the potential for a warmer and drier microclimate under more open forest canopies (EA, p. 35 and Fire and Fuels Report, p. 14). However, even with a slightly elevated, short-term potential for a fire ignition, the chance of a crown fire and rapid fire spread will be lessened because ladder and canopy fuels will be reduced (Fire and Fuels Report, p. 15). I find the short-term, localized increase in potential for fire ignitions will not be significant, and the actions and effects of the selected alternative meet laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for fire and fuel management (EA, p. 44 and Fire and Fuels Report, p. 30-33).

Air Quality – During prescribed burning, the selected alternative will produce smoke which will have some negative effects on air quality during the burning periods and for a short time after. However, as noted in the EA (p. 43) and in the Fire and Fuels Report (p. 25), the IPNF is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group that works with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality to limit smoke accumulations to legal, acceptable limits. The Bonners Ferry Ranger District complies with procedures required by the Airshed Group and has no air quality violations. Smoke emissions from prescribed burning will not exceed legal smoke emission limits as a result of using the established Airshed Group protocols; therefore, I find the effects will not reach the significance threshold.

Hydrology – The selected alternative will cause short-term, minimal increases in water yield and sediment delivery to streams (EA, p. 49-51, Hydrology Report, p. 57-59). Road maintenance, reconstruction, temporary road construction, and other road activities associated with the project will cause some isolated increases in sediment, but there will be a net reduction over the long term because of the improvements made to roads and stream crossings. The water yield increases and the short-term sediment increases will not affect stream channel stability and equilibrium (EA, p. 50-51, Hydrology Report, p. 1). There will be no effects to domestic water sources (EA, p. 52). Although some stream segments in the analysis area are listed by Idaho Department of Environmental Quality as having elevated stream temperatures, the project will not affect water temperature. This is because design features and Inland Native Fish Strategy riparian habitat conservation area guidelines would help maintain and enhance the canopy cover over streams in the project area and thus help maintain or reduce water temperatures in streams (EA, p. 55).

The selected alternative meets watershed and hydrology Forest Plan direction and relevant laws, regulations, policies, and plans (EA, p. 51-52). I find the effects to hydrology resources are not significant.

Fisheries – The selected alternative will not affect any threatened and endangered fish species or their habitat (EA, p. 53 and Fish Biological Assessment in project file). The project may affect individual westslope cutthroat trout (a Region 1 sensitive species) and an isolated population of this fish species in Placer Creek, but will not likely lead to a trend that would warrant federal listing of this species (EA, p. 57 and Fisheries Resource Report, p. 30). The road improvements on FSR 2540 along Placer Creek will reduce the existing, chronic sediment source (Fisheries Resource Report, p. 24). Effects of the selected alternative on other aquatic habitat indicators (for example, water temperature, stream habitat complexity, instream large wood, habitat fragmentation and riparian zone function) will either be neutral or somewhat beneficial (Fisheries Resource Report, p. 21-28).

The selected alternative meets relevant laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for fisheries (EA, p. 57). I find the effects to the fisheries resources are not significant.

Wildlife – A detailed effects analysis was conducted for three terrestrial wildlife species and one group of species that uses similar habitat. For a summary of effects and an assessment of significance for grizzly bear and Canada lynx, see the ninth intensity factor, below. The wildlife analysis also considered how the project would affect the following sensitive species: fisher, flammulated owl, pygmy nuthatch, and fringed myotis (Wildlife Report).

The proposed action will harvest timber on up to 2,529 acres of capable fisher habitat, including regeneration harvest on about 395 acres in stands that provide potentially suitable

denning habitat. It is questionable if these stands would progress to an older, more decadent stage absent a stand-replacing event. Based on current conditions, perhaps 240 acres of the potentially suitable stands in proposed units could reasonably be expected to maintain suitability over time if left untreated (Wildlife Report p. 51). The storage of some existing roads would reduce trapper access during the winter and decrease mortality risk (EA, p. 63-64). However, because of the lack of overmature (late successional, old and decadent) forest, the Deer Creek Project area generally does not contain large amounts of fisher suitable denning structure. Additionally, given the residential development and industrial forest land in the western portion of the project area, fisher occupancy is unlikely regardless of the habitat condition on National Forest System lands (EA, p. 64). Adequate habitat exists for viable fisher populations on other areas of the IPNF, so the small reduction of suitable habitat with the selected alternative may impact fisher or their habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species (Wildlife Report, p. 55).

The selected alternative would have long-term beneficial effects on the condition of dry forest habitats for flammulated owl, pygmy nuthatch, and fringed myotis by reducing stand density while favoring retention of larger trees and snags. (EA, p. 64-65). During vegetation and fuel treatments, some temporary disturbance to individuals may occur but given the mobility of these species, the effect would be minor (Wildlife Report, p. 61). The project may impact individuals of these species or their habitat but will not contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species (Wildlife Report, p. 63).

Given the intensity and context of the effects described above for the sensitive wildlife species and threatened and endangered species (grizzly bear and Canada lynx) discussed in the ninth intensity factor, I conclude the effects to wildlife resources are not significant. The selected alternative meets relevant laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for wildlife (EA, p. 65).

Soils – The selected alternative will have minimal potential for sediment delivery, surface and subsurface erosion, and mass failures (EA, p. 68-69 and Soil Resource Report, p. 8-11). Design features will protect or retain coarse woody debris, soil organic matter, and soil nutrient capital at levels that meet Forest Plan direction and Region 1 soil quality standards (EA, p. 70 and Soil Resource Report, p. 14-17). The project will have small adverse effects on soil productivity in some treatment units from soil compaction, rutting, or displacement (EA, 67-68 and Soil Resource Report, p. 17-23). Forest Plan direction and regional soil quality standards specify full productivity potential will be maintained on at least 85 percent of the activity areas. The selected alternative will retain approximately 89 percent of the productivity and will be in compliance with relevant laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for soil resources (EA, pp. 67 and 70; Soil Resource Report, pp. 23-24). The alternative I have selected will not have a significant effect on soils.

Rare Plants – The selected alternative will not affect threatened or endangered plant species or their habitat (EA, pp. 70-71). Several new rare plant species were discovered during extensive and intensive rare plant surveys within the project area. These plant species were all on the Region 1 sensitive plant list or the IPNF species of concern list (Rare Plant Report, pp. 3-4). Known rare plant locations will be protected from effects (EA, p. 73). There will be no effects to species requiring aquatic, peatland, deciduous, riparian, or subalpine habitat

because no activities are taking place in these habitat types (EA, p. 74). For the rare plant species in the dry, moist, wet, or cold forest guilds, effects to the habitat or undetected plants will be very low, low, or moderate depending upon the habitat guild (Rare Plant Report, p. 29). In other words, effects range from "no measurable effects" to "individual plants or habitat may be impacted but would not result in a loss of population viability" (Rare Plant Report, p. 29).

My selection of alternative 2 will not have significant impacts on rare plants, and this project complies with relevant laws, regulations, policies, plans, and Forest Plan direction for rare plants (Rare Plant Resource Report, pp. 29-30).

Recreation and Scenic Quality – Impacts of the selected alternative will not permanently change the recreation opportunity spectrum in the area. Increased road traffic and related activities will occur, especially near Solomon Lake (EA, p. 87). However, the activities are appropriate in the rural, roaded natural, and roaded modified settings where they would occur (EA, p. 88). The trail construction near the Meadow Creek Campground and the re-design and development of the Solomon Lake camping and boat launch area will provide recreation benefits (EA, p. 89). Some dispersed campsites in the project area will be temporally impacted by the increase in road traffic, dust, and noise (EA, p. 88). Roadside activities, such as berry picking and firewood gathering, will be temporarily interrupted but will likely return to the present levels after project activities. The repair of a washout on FSR 2533 will allow the public to regain road access to popular dispersed recreation sites on the Moyie River (EA, p. 89).

Activities associated with the selected alternative will occur in areas that have a scenic integrity objective of either moderate or high (EA, p. 95). To ensure those objectives are met, design features were included in the project (Scenic Quality Report, pp. 16-18). As a result, the project will meet Forest Plan scenic integrity objectives (EA, p. 98).

The alternative I selected will not have significant impacts on either the recreation or scenic resources in the area, and the project will be consistent with Forest Plan direction (EA, p. 88 and 98).

Non-Native Invasive Plants – Nine species of non-native invasive plants occur in the project area. Most populations are along existing County and National Forest System roads (EA, p. 75). Project design features and mitigation measures included in the selected alternative will reduce the risk of project activities causing invasive plants to spread (EA, p. 76 and Invasive Plant Risk Assessment report, pp. 7-11). However, the risk is still moderate (Invasive Plant Risk Assessment report, p. 16). There is a low risk of the selected alternative introducing a new invader species (EA, p. 77). The project will meet laws, regulations, policies, and Forest Plan direction for management of noxious weeds and non-native invasive plants (Invasive Plant Risk Assessment report, pp. 19-20).

2. ***The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.***

It is my determination the selected alternative will not have significant effects on public health and safety. Warning signs will be placed in areas where logging traffic may interfere with recreational traffic to inform visitors of logging activities. Prescribed burning will only occur when weather and air conditions are favorable for smoke dispersal. No burning will be initiated when air quality restrictions are in place (see the "Air Quality" discussion under

factor 1). I recognize the value of snags for wildlife habitat, and they will remain standing where possible. I also recognize snags may need to be felled for the safety of workers during operations (EA, p. 146). Reducing forest stand stocking levels and fuel loads will lower the probability of extreme fire behavior in the treated stands. This is a benefit to adjacent private land and improves firefighter safety (see the "Fuels" discussion under factor 1). Domestic water sources in the project area will be protected (EA, pp. 18 and 132).

3. ***Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.***

   No adverse effects to cultural resources (either historic properties or archeological sites of undetermined eligibility status) will occur with the selected alternative (EA, p. 80). No unique parklands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers are located in the project area. No long-term, measurable negative effects to riparian areas or wetlands are expected with this project because we will be using riparian habitat conservation area standards (EA pp. 45-51). There will be no effect on old growth (EA, p. 19). The project will have short-term, negative effects on the Buckhorn Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area and the larger roadless expanse from prescribed burning and the sights and sounds of helicopter and chainsaw use associated with that burning (EA, p. 90 and project file document # D-12). However, the selected alternative will improve several roadless characteristics in the IRA and within the roadless expanse by reducing the likelihood of a high-intensity, stand-replacing wildfire (EA, p. 90 and project file document #D-12). The project will meet roadless area laws, regulations, and other Forest Service guidance (EA, p. 91 and project file document #D-12). The selected alternative will not have significant impacts on the unique characteristics of the area.

4. ***The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.***

   Monitoring shows effects of similar projects are consistent with estimated effects of the proposed activities (see monitoring reports on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website[3]). Effects of the proposed activities on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. This conclusion is based on the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information; a consideration of responsible opposing views; and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Resource reports document the use of the best available science for each resource. The project file includes relevant literature citations, science references, biological assessments, and monitoring results used in the project analysis to support this decision.

5. ***The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

   The planned actions are similar to actions implemented in other areas on National Forest System land and on State, County, and private lands. Effects will be similar to those of past actions. The analysis considered the effects of past actions combined with the estimated effects of the proposal (see the cumulative effects analyses in the individual resource reports). I conclude there are no unique or unusual characteristics of the area which have not been previously encountered or which constitute an unknown risk to the human environment.

[3] http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ipnf/landmanagement/planning

6. ***The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

   The proposed management actions are similar to actions conducted in the project area, in other areas on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District, and on other ranger districts of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. None of these other projects had significant effects, and the selected alternative is not setting a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Management practices are consistent with the Forest Plan and within the capabilities of the local ecosystem (Idaho Panhandle National Forests Monitoring Reports[4]). The selected alternative does not represent a decision in principle about future considerations.

7. ***Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.***

   The combined effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions were considered and are summarized in the cumulative effects analysis for each resource. Past actions considered in the cumulative effects analyses include those that contributed to the baseline conditions in the project area. There are no indications of significant cumulative effects to the environment (EA, pp. 29, 33, 44, 47, 50, 56, 70, 74, 77, 80, 82, 83, and 98).

8. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources.***

   The selected alternative will have no effect on heritage properties located within the project area. All public, tribal, and Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) consultation has been completed (project file). The following agencies and Tribal cultural staff and official government entities were consulted: Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Coeur D'Alene Tribe, and the Kalispel Tribe (Cultural Resource Report, p. 17).

9. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act.***

   The selected alternative will not impact any plant or fish species listed under the Endangered Species Act (EA, pp. 53 and 71, Fish BA, p. 12). The project will not affect woodland caribou or its critical habitat (Wildlife Report, p. 12). The selected alternative may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, Canada lynx (Wildlife BA, p. 19). The project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, grizzly bears and their habitat (Wildlife BA, p. 34). Effects to Canada lynx and grizzly bear are discussed in more detail below. We received a biological opinion on grizzly bear and a letter of concurrence on lynx from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service following consultation with them on our actions (project file).

   Canada lynx – the selected alternative will conduct prescribed burning over 394 acres of lynx habitat in the Deer-Skin lynx analysis unit and implement other activities in non-lynx habitat within the lynx analysis unit (Wildlife BA, p. 12). As a result, the project would make minor modifications to habitat but it would not disturb or displace resident lynx at a level that would result in mortality or significant disruption of behavioral patterns such as breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Consequently, these activities may affect, but are not likely to

[4] http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ipnf/landmanagement/planning

adversely affect, Canada lynx (Wildlife BA, p. 18). Less than two percent of lynx habitat would be affected in the Deer-Skin lynx analysis unit. Denning areas are abundant and well-distributed throughout the lynx analysis unit, and project activities are not expected to measurably affect lynx movement. As a result, the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, critical habitat for the Canada lynx (Wildlife BA, p. 19).

Grizzly bear – The selected alternative authorizes various activities within the Keno bear management unit (BMU) of the Cabinet-Yaak recovery zone and within the Mission-Moyie bears outside the recovery zone (BORZ).

Within the BMU, project activities will temporarily (for up to six years) increase total motorized route density and increase open motorized route density for three non-consecutive years (project file). The temporary increase in route density will not increase the risk of direct grizzly bear mortality because these roads will remain closed to the public (Wildlife BA, p. 34). Once project activities are complete, open motorized route density will return to approximately pre-project levels and total motorized route density will be slightly lower. Existing core habitat in the bear management unit will be affected but a greater amount of replacement core habitat will be created prior to any other road work in the BMU through storage of portions of an existing open, and currently restricted roads. Ultimately, this will increase the total core area in the bear management unit by 0.7 percent. (Wildlife BA, p. 34). In the BORZ area, project activities will not permanently increase miles of open or total roads, and effects to bears will be insignificant and discountable (Wildlife BA, p. 34).

The project will increase forest vegetation diversity and create forage in and near the bear management unit and will improve grizzly bear habitat over the long term by increasing core habitat and reducing total motorized route density. Project design features and mandatory conservation measures for grizzly bear will reduce detrimental effects to this species and its habitat (EA, p. 144 and Wildlife BA, p. 35). However, use of helicopters for some prescribed burning activities and the temporary increase in open motorized route density will result in some detrimental effects. The determination is that the project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, grizzly bears and their habitat (Wildlife BA, p. 34-35).

The selected alternative is consistent with relevant Forest Plan (including motorized access amendment direction) guidelines and standards for management of the grizzly bear and its habitat (project file). After careful consideration of the intensity of effects the project will have on the grizzly bear, I find they will not be significant.

Wolverine – The Deer Creek Project would affect less than 150 acres (burn unit 4 and a portion of burn unit 3) of year-round wolverine habitat (persistent spring snow cover areas). The habitat changes as a result of these burns would have minor effects on this species, and impacts to prey densities would be temporary. While about 60 acres of potential maternal denning habitat could be affected by burning, this burning would not take place during the denning period. As a result, potential impacts to wolverine or their habitat would be discountable (small in scale) and insignificant (proposed activities are not considered to be a threat to the species). Consequently, the action alternatives, in conjunction with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, may impact North American wolverine or their habitat, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species (Wildlife Report, pp. 84-85). All of the proposed activities can be placed into the broad categories of actions discussed and consulted on in the *Programmatic*

Biological Assessment for North American Wolverine. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service subsequently concurred with the determination that project activities within these categories will not jeopardize the continued existence of the distinct population segment of the North American wolverine (FWS reference 06E11000-2014-I-0291).

10. ***Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The alternative I have selected will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered for each resource analyzed in the EA, and they are discussed in more detail in the specialist reports. The selected alternative is consistent with the IPNF Forest Plan.

OBJECTION REVIEW PROCESS

A draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact was issued on February 28, 2017, which was subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218. The 45-day objection period commenced with publication of a legal notice in the Coeur d'Alene Press on March 1, 2017.

Two objections were received for this project, one from the Alliance for the Wild Rockies (Mr. Garrity) and one from Mr. Wynsma. The Regional Forester's staff (reviewing officer) reviewed each objection, the suggested remedies, the EA, draft DN/FONSI, and the contents in the project file. The Deputy Regional Forester offered to meet with each of the objectors. Neither Objector responded to the offers so no meetings took place.

On May 30, 2017, the Deputy Regional Forester responded to both objectors with letters. Regarding Mr. Wynsma objection, the Deputy Regional Forester reviewed the assertions that the project violates various environmental laws, regulations, polices and the Forest Plan. The Deputy Regional Forester found that the responsible official considered and responded to Mr. Wynsma comments and that there was no violation of law, policy, or Forest Plan requirements.

Upon review of the objection submitted by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies on behalf of Mr. Garrity, the Deputy Regional Forester provided the following two instructions to the responsible official; to consider the effects that the project would have on the roadless expanse and to address the Kosterman thesis related to lynx. Once those instructions were followed, the Deputy Regional Forester found that the project would be in compliance with all of the applicable laws and the Forest Plan.

Both of those instructions have now been followed. An analysis was conducted on the potential impacts of the project on the roadless expanse. In reviewing that analysis, I find that the impacts of the selected alternative would not be significant to the roadless expanse. The detailed analysis can be found in a resource report located in both the project file (project file document # D-12) as well as on the public website (see the resource report titled Forest Plan Special Designations and Inventoried Roadless Area).

In regard to the Kosterman thesis, the following discussion addresses this topic. The adequacy of Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) standards has recently come into question when compared to results of Kosterman' s 2014 thesis. However, the manner in which vegetation was classified in the thesis does not readily lend itself to comparison with NRLMD standards. The optimum amount of young forest (10-15%) identified in the thesis appears to be a

subset of the vegetation types used to formulate the 30% (VEG S1) standard in the NRLMD, and the mature forest vegetation class described in the thesis (which identifies greater that 50% available in lynx home ranges) appears to include a large range of mature forest structural types that may or may not provide quality habitat for snowshoe hare. Even so, the cumulative effects of the Deer Creek project and other planned activities would result in less than 12 percent early successional habitat in the Deer Skin LAU (Wildlife Report p. 28) – which is within the range suggested by Kosterman (2014). Additionally, nearly 58 percent of lynx habitat in the Deer-Skin LAU is forested stands larger than 10 inches diameter at breast height – much or all of which could fit the Kosterman (2014) definition of "mature forest" (large trees, continuous canopy, and no evidence of recent disturbance). Kosterman' s thesis may be found in the project file (document # Q-212) as well as a previous letter that was written from the Regional Forester to the Objector regarding the Kosterman thesis (document #Q-213).

The Objector's letters and the written responses to these objections are posted on the IPNF forest website at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=40785 .

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

I have satisfied the objection review requirements under 36 CFR 218.12, therefore, implementation on this project may begin immediately.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Dave Cobb, Deer Creek Project Leader, (208) 443-6854; dcobb@fs.fed.us.

Mary Farnsworth
Forest Supervisor
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

6/8/17
Date